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ABSTRACT

This discussion guide is designed to help students engage in the kind of dialogue about racism and race relations that can make a difference in their community. In study circles (small-group, democratic, participatory discussions), students have the chance to get to know one another, consider different points of view, explore disagreements, and discover common ground. In these community-wide study circle programs, in every region of the country, study circle organizers are showing the power of combining dialogue and action. People from all races and ethnicities are working together to make strides on difficult race-related issues, such as, bias crime, community-police relations, race relations among young people, diversity issues, and connecting citizens to governance. Discussion materials are: (1) "Race relations and racism: Experiences, perceptions, and beliefs"; (2) "Dealing with race: What is the nature of the problem?"; (3) "What should we do to make progress on race relations?"; (4) "What kinds of public policies will help us deal with race relations?"; and (5) "How can we move from words to action in our community?" Additional sections address how to use this guide. This discussion guide, used primarily for community study groups, could be used in the secondary social studies classroom to initiate discussions on the history of racism, conflict resolution, and citizen participation in the community. (BT)

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The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide:

Facing the Challenge of Racism and Race Relations

3rd Edition

SO 029 704

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FOREWORD

Issues of racism and race relations are critical in our country and in our communities. Today, a growing number of people are recognizing the importance of public dialogue as a critical step in making progress on those issues.

This discussion guide is designed to help you engage in the kind of dialogue about racism and race relations that can make a difference in your community. In study circles — small-group, democratic, participatory discussions — people have the chance to get to know one another, consider different points of view, explore disagreements, and discover common ground. In communities where study circles are ongoing and widespread, they are a way for people to work together democratically to actively address the issues they are facing.

In these community-wide study circle programs, in every region of the country, study circle organizers are showing the power of combining dialogue and action. As a result of sustained, interracial, democratic dialogue, thousands of people from all races and ethnicities are working together to make strides on some of the toughest race-related issues we face — bias crime, community-police relations, race relations among young people, diversity issues, connecting citizens to governance, and more.

This third edition incorporates many of the learnings from those programs. The final session of this guide — "How can we move from words to action in our community?" — demonstrates the kinds of actions that are coming out of study circles. This is a powerful testimony to what people can do when they have the opportunity to come together for democratic dialogue and action on questions of race.

But the work that must be done to address the challenge of racism and race relations has only begun. We urge you not just to read this guide, but to USE IT. Put study circles to work in your community, and adapt them to your needs. Contact us at the Study Circles Resource Center for assistance. We can share the lessons that other communities are learning, and put you in touch with others who are organizing similar programs. We also want to learn from you, so that we can more fully document the ways in which communities are using democratic dialogue to meet one of the most important challenges our country is facing.

An urgent need for democratic dialogue on race in our country and our communities

Race is a central issue in our nation and our communities. Even when we don't give voice to it, it is present — critical, but unspoken.

When we do talk about it, it is often at times of crisis, when racial divisions become apparent or racial tensions turn to violence. There are times of national awareness — the violence in Los Angeles in 1992, or the tensions following the O.J. Simpson verdict — when the country's problems with race transfix all of us. But when the tensions fade from view, our public recognition of race seems to go back into hiding, and we wonder if anything has changed at all.

A growing number of national and community leaders are starting to change that reality. They are calling for a dialogue about race that will help everyday people openly examine racism and race relations, and work together to make progress on this critical issue.

Those leaders realize that questions of racism and race relations touch us every day, in personal ways. Race affects where we live, where we walk, where we shop, the jobs we hold, and how we are educated. In workplaces, schools, and houses of worship, racial and ethnic divisions persist. Misperceptions, stereotyping, fear, and distrust exist in every ethnic group toward members of other ethnic groups.

Race also has a great impact on our public life. In our communities, racial and ethnic divisions prevent us from working together on pressing common concerns such as education, jobs, and crime. In our national public life, there is a longstanding stalemate on those policy issues that are directly related to our country's history of race relations. And racial and ethnic concerns and conflicts underlie many other public issues.

Given our country's history, it is no wonder that race is so important today. Racism has played a key role for hundreds of years, clashing with our founding principles of equality and justice. The wars against Native American tribes and later discrimination against native peoples; the enslavement of Africans brought to this country and the oppression of African-Americans after they were freed; the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II; and discrimination against immigrants — all of these and more have been based on the belief that some people are inferior due to the color of their skin.

The struggle for racial equality has also played a key role in our history. In the civil rights movement, many Americans fought for racial justice. Attitudes and situations that were once the norm — racist statements by political officials, separate and inferior public institutions for blacks,

the legal refusal to serve blacks in restaurants or to accommodate them in hotels — began to change as the result of heroic individual and collective struggles.

What about today? While almost everyone acknowledges that we have moved forward as a result of the civil rights movement, many people are concerned that progress has stalled. Others fear that we are actually losing ground.

Though our perspectives vary, problems with race relations still loom large for our country. These problems are complex, defying simple definitions or quick solutions. All of us — from every ethnic and racial background — have had experiences that give us unique understandings of race and its impact on our personal and public lives. As an example, many whites believe that we have made a lot of progress on racial issues, that we are "almost there." At the same time, many people of color believe that we still have a long way to go.

On such a complex issue, with so many different experiences and understandings, how can we as a society make meaningful progress?

In a democracy, progress on race relations can happen when every person takes part in defining the problems and finding ways to work with others to solve them. At the heart of that participation is democratic dialogue, where people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds sit down together and have opportunities to:

- respectfully hear each other's experiences and concerns. In this way, people can come to better understand and appreciate others, rethink stereotypes and misperceptions, and build relationships.
- consider a wide variety of views. In this way, people can grapple with the many sides of public problems, come to a more complete understanding of the issues, explore disagreements, and search for common concerns. This openness lays a strong foundation for multifaceted community collaboration and problem solving.
- devise practical actions and strategies for addressing racism and race relations. Through the dialogue, people develop new community networks and new ideas for action at every level. In this way, they have the opportunity to fulfill the potential of their deliberation by working with others to make a difference.

A growing number of communities are creating and sustaining this kind of opportunity for democratic dialogue and action on race. They are finding ways to involve people from all races and ethnicities, all political beliefs, all faiths, all education levels, and all walks of life. They are also finding ways to help community members carry their dialogue forward from meaningful personal change into collective action. As more and more communities move ahead in this challenging work, our country will make the kind of progress on race relations that many of us have dreamed of for so long.

SESSION ONE

Race relations and racism: Experiences, perceptions, and beliefs

1

The purpose of this session is to share some personal experiences, stories, and perspectives about race relations, and to think about how race affects us on a day-to-day basis. It's not always easy to talk about race relations. A commitment to the study circle process — open, thoughtful, focused discussion — will help you make progress. By listening to one another's stories, we can gain insights into our own beliefs and those of others, and come to new understandings of the issues we face.

Beginning the discussion

1. **Talk for a few minutes about your racial, ethnic, or cultural background.**
2. **Relate a story or give an example to illustrate how your background or experiences have contributed to your attitudes about race relations.**
3. **Have you experienced racism personally? Have you seen it in practice? How has it affected you or people you know?**
4. **In what ways do your attitudes toward persons of other racial or ethnic groups differ from those of your parents?**
5. **You probably have heard expressions of prejudice from family members, friends, co-workers, or neighbors. How do you think they learned their prejudice? How do you feel when you hear these expressions? How do you react?**
6. **How often do you have contact with people of other races or ethnic groups? under what circumstances — at work, at social events, in stores, in other places?**
7. **Do you have friends of other races? If not, why? If so, how did you get to know them?**
8. **How do you help your children deal with racism? How do you help them understand race relations?**

Looking at the cases

Read over the list of cases below. Choose a few to discuss. The following questions may be useful for your discussion:

9. **What is your first response to each of these cases?**
10. **What, if anything, do you think the people described in each case should do?**
11. **What, if anything, do you think organizations — such as businesses, congregations, and civic groups — should do?**
12. **What, if anything, do you think the government should do?**
13. **What, if anything, would you do if you were the person involved? if you were looking on?**
14. **Tell a story about something that has happened to you or a member of your family. Why is it important to you? Is it an example of a common experience, or not?**

Case 1:
A Latina woman does not get a job as a receptionist because she speaks English with an accent.

Case 2:
A white man who wants to be on the police force is not hired, while several minority applicants with equal scores on the qualifying test are hired.

Case 3:
A black couple tells their children to be extra careful at the shopping mall. The parents remind the children to stay together, and they also advise the children to keep receipts for everything they buy.

Case 4:
A recent newspaper article made public charges of discrimination that were raised against a local bank. An investigation of mortgage loan approvals revealed that rejection rates were higher for blacks and for biracial families, despite solid credit histories.

Case 5:
An environmental survey of a small city shows that poor minority neighborhoods have much higher levels of the kinds of pollution which cause health problems and birth defects.

Case 6:
An African-American woman who works at a mostly white corporation notes that some of her white co-workers are more likely to find fault with her when she wears braids in her hair and dresses in African fashions.

Case 7:
A group of African-American college students starts a new fraternity on campus. They hold parties and other events, and invite only other African-Americans.

Case 8:
An Hispanic man who works as a middle manager in a company is fired because his boss says he doesn't produce results. He claims the color of his skin was an important factor in this decision. He says he has always felt that he was being treated differently by his co-workers, but he has been afraid to speak out until now.

Case 9:
An Asian American woman has cosmetic surgery on her eyes so that they'll have a more "Anglo" look, feeling that she'll be more attractive this way.

Case 10:

A state university decides that it will no longer take a student's race into consideration when making admissions decisions. The next year, the number of nonwhite students entering the school drops sharply.

Case 11:

You and your date are walking to your car after seeing a late movie. You see a group of young black men coming toward you. They are wearing baggy clothes and talking loudly. Fearing a confrontation, you cross the street.

Case 12:

After a terrorist incident is featured in the news, a man who is from the Middle East feels that people are suspicious of him.

Case 13:

A Mexican American family tries to rent an apartment in a part of town that is mostly white. When they arrive to see the place, the landlord tells them he rented the apartment that morning. The family has doubts.

Case 14:

A white couple is looking for a house. Their real estate agent steers them toward houses in white neighborhoods, never showing them houses available in other sections of town.

Wrap-up questions

1. **Why did you decide to take part in this study circle program?**
2. **What would it take for these discussions to be meaningful to you?**

In preparation for the next meeting, think about the following questions:

When it comes to race, what problems are we facing?
What are the most serious challenges facing our community, and what are the community's greatest strengths for dealing with those challenges?

Dealing with race: What is the nature of the problem?

2

Many of us share a desire to improve race relations and to end racial inequality. But, when we are asked to describe the kinds of problems our society is facing with race, our answers vary a lot. We sometimes disagree about the nature of our racial problems, what caused them, and how serious they are.

It makes sense, then, to talk about what we are facing before we talk about solutions. This session presents a range of viewpoints to help participants have an open conversation that explores different understandings of our racial problems. Each view is written in the voice of someone who supports that position. The viewpoints are not presented as "truths"; rather, they are provided as a starting point for this discussion. Other viewpoints are likely to emerge as the dialogue unfolds. As you sift through the views, remember to give a fair hearing to the ideas that arise.

Beginning the discussion

1. **Think back to what you learned in school about the history of race relations in this country. What made an impression on you? What do you think kids today should learn about the history of race relations?**

2. **As a group, use brainstorming to come up with some definitions for the following list of words: race, racism, institutional racism, and reverse discrimination. As you define these words, be sure to give examples where you can.**

Looking at the viewpoints

3. **Which one of the viewpoints comes closest to your own? Why? What other views would you add?**

4. **Imagine that you are in a conversation with a person who holds views that you oppose. What stories or personal experiences would you share to let that person know why you look at the issue the way you do?**

5. **Take a viewpoint that you disagree with, and try to make an argument in favor of it. What experiences, beliefs, and values might lead a reasonable person to support the views that are different from your own?**

What is the nature of the problem?

View 1:

History is at the root of the problem.

According to this view, certain groups of people were treated unjustly in the past, and the effects of that history are still with us today. For example, Native Americans and African-Americans have never had a fair chance to get ahead. When Europeans arrived on this continent, they banished Native Americans from their lands. As a result, many Native Americans live in extreme poverty today. Think about how much our treatment of African-Americans still affects us. Over a period of more than 300 years — more than 250 years of slave labor, and 100 years of Jim Crow segregation — blacks suffered horrible abuses. Because of this history, the group as a whole is lagging behind. Today, it may be possible for some African-Americans to get ahead, but it is unrealistic to expect everyone to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Though people today are not directly responsible for what happened in the past, our history remains a source of pain, injury, and conflict.

View 2:

The real problem is institutional racism.

According to this view, racism is firmly established in the institutions of our society. Power continues to be used in a way that favors whites and works against people of color. This happens in our

businesses, agencies, government, the media, schools, the criminal justice system, and more. This kind of "institutional racism" can be direct and intentional. For example, much of our housing was deliberately segregated on the basis of race. But institutional racism can also be indirect, unplanned, and hidden, which makes it even harder to deal with. For example, when a supermarket closes a branch in a poor urban neighborhood where many people of color live, they no longer have access to basic, essential services. While there are laws against racial discrimination, there are no laws against closing a store. In all kinds of ways, American institutions continue to limit opportunities for people of color and treat them as second-class citizens. It's been this way for so long that white people don't even know how much the system favors them.

View 3:

The problem is that many people of color lack economic opportunity.

According to this view, our real problems with race often come down to unequal money, jobs, and opportunities. Economic inequality makes our problems with race even worse. Some minorities have made economic progress, but there is still a long way to go. For example, people of color who are in the middle class still face barriers to advancement. And too many people of color live in poverty. Poor people in the cities, especially blacks and Latinos, live in an economic wasteland. They lack hope, good role models, good schools, and good jobs. The collapse of the low-wage economy has wrecked neighborhood businesses, and reduced the number of jobs for poor people who have few marketable skills. These people suffer the most from changes in our nation's economy — including the loss of manufacturing jobs. Without opportunities to get ahead, poor people in the cities are more likely to face other problems like drugs and violence, gangs, and teen pregnancy. It is too easy to think of race relations as a matter of "getting along better." People who are born poor, and who are not white, just don't have the same chances to make a good life for themselves.

View 4:

The problem is that too many people of color are not taking advantage of the opportunities available to them.

According to this view, internalized racism keeps many minorities from moving forward. Many people of color feel defeated by their race before they even try to succeed as individuals. Lacking confidence, some minorities expect too little of themselves — that is, their ambitions are often modest compared to their abilities. Because of the self-doubt that racism has helped to create, others engage in certain kinds of behavior that get in the way of their success. For example, drug use and irresponsible sexual behavior make it very unlikely that some people will succeed in school or at work. Still others seem to have just given up, because they see themselves as victims. In the worst cases, people of color try to use race to get special treatment, or they point to the country's history of race relations as a way of avoiding responsibility for their own actions. As long as people of color feel helpless or second-rate, they won't have the confidence to seize opportunities to get ahead. For that reason, our country will continue to have problems that fall along racial lines.

View 5:

Separation and prejudice are still our major problems.

According to this view, many of our problems exist because people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds live separately. We may see each other at work, but our lives are still separate. We live in different parts of town, send our kids to different schools, attend different churches, and socialize at different places. Because we do not really know each other, there is a "knowledge gap," which is filled by images in the media. We cannot trust the media to show us what people are really like. Instead, what we usually see on television and in films are stereotypes — for example, "the intelligent Asian student," "the rough Latino gang member," "the African-American single mother on welfare," or "the empty-headed white." This only creates more prejudice. To make things even worse, we lack opportunities for people from different racial backgrounds to get to know each other. We also lack ways for diverse groups of people to work together on common problems. As long as we are strangers to each other, and don't see each other as part of the same community, our problems will continue.

View 6:

The problem is our lack of strong leadership.

According to this view, we lack leaders with real vision who can motivate and unify the many people who long for racial equality. Instead of uniting us, many of today's leaders tend to pull people of different racial and ethnic groups apart. Race continues to be a divisive issue because the loudest outcry about racism usually comes from public figures who talk about race just to stir up their audiences. Many white people are turned off by minority leaders who see racism in everything. Some powerful whites make racist remarks, which sicken people of color and make many whites feel ashamed. The bitterness on both sides threatens and alienates people who care about race issues. In the early days of the civil rights movement, leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., brought people of different races together. Today, very few leaders are working to inspire those of us who are willing to work for equality and justice.

Wrap-up questions

1. **What is the nature of the problem with race in our community?**

2. **Over the years, what events have had the biggest impact on racial and ethnic relations in your neighborhood? in the community as a whole?**

In preparation for the next meeting, think about the following questions:

What can we do to make progress in our community?

When it comes to strategies to improve race relations and to eliminate racism, what sorts of proposals do you know about?

Try to identify a broad range of possibilities. What are the pros and cons of the various approaches?

For further discussion: How far have we really come?

The following series of questions is designed to help you consider each other's ideas about the progress we have made on race.

(a) As a group, examine this question: Over your lifetime, where have we seen progress in race relations? Make a list of signs of improvement.

(b) Take some time to review your list. Consider the reasons behind the progress you point out; make a list of your ideas about *why* you think we have been able to make progress in these areas. Is individual action or personal commitment the reason? Have government actions or policies played a role? Have private institutions been important? What else may be at work?

(c) Next, put together a list of signs that suggest we have not come as far as we might in improving race relations.

(d) Review your list together, and reflect on the reasons behind the lack of progress. Why haven't race relations progressed, or why have they stalled? Is individual responsibility the reason? Have government actions or policies played a role? Have private institutions been important? What else may be at work? Again, make a list of your ideas.

(e) Compare the two lists. What picture of race relations comes into view?

(f) What do we most need to work on in the country? in our community?

(g) What signs would you need to see to be convinced that we are making real progress on race relations?

SESSION THREE

What should we do to make progress on race relations?

3

Race is something we all deal with. Yet there is little consensus on what we should *do* about the racial problems we face. The goal of this session is to think and talk about possible directions for change.

The heart of this session is a range of viewpoints on how our society might address and make progress on race relations. The views invite you to consider a variety of approaches. Each is written in the voice of someone who supports that position. They are not presented as "truths"; rather, they are provided as a starting place for this discussion. Other perspectives are likely to emerge as the dialogue unfolds. As you sift through the views, the most important thing is to give a fair hearing to the ideas that arise.

Looking at the viewpoints

1. **Does one of the viewpoints, or some combination of views, come closest to your own? Why? What life experiences or values inform your perspective?**

2. **What view(s) are most distant from your own? What experiences, beliefs, and values might lead a reasonable person to support the views that are different from your own?**

3. **What are the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective?**

4. **What other viewpoints would you add to this discussion? What, if any, perspectives are missing?**

What should we do to make progress on race relations?

View 1:

We must fight prejudice, and build interracial understanding.

According to this view, we must work to improve racial understanding, end prejudice, and build solid relationships among people of different races. We need to be aware of the ways race affects our lives. Whites should think about the kinds of discrimination minorities still face on a daily basis. Whites also need to recognize the many privileges they have, just because they are white. For example, whites usually are not afraid that police will treat them unfairly just because of their skin color. People of color also have to play an active role in building bridges between the races. It's important for them to stay open-minded when white people reach out — personally, in the workplace, or in the community. All of us must speak out against prejudice or racism whenever we hear it or see it in action in our daily lives, among our friends, at work, or in public settings. Together, we can end prejudice by looking hard at our ideas about race, by building relationships across racial lines, and by refusing to tolerate racist behavior.

View 2:

We need to work together on common projects.

According to this view, people of all different racial and ethnic groups need to work as a team to improve the community. While we should not underestimate our differences, we should not make too much of them either. If we work side by side on issues that matter to all of us, we can move beyond stereotypes, and really learn to appreciate each other. Shared projects — a park clean-up, for example — remind us of the things we have in common. They show us that we can come together to make good things happen, and they remind us how much we need each other. Through neighborhood watch programs and community policing, we can help to reduce crime, get rid of drugs, and make families and business owners feel safer. Our ability to connect with each other, to build bridges across color lines, is basic to solving the problems we share. When we work on issues of mutual concern, we are doing the kind of multiracial work this country needs.

View 3:

We need to address institutional racism.

According to this view, we must confront the racism in our institutions, and promote fairness and equality. First, we need to identify and expose the racial bias which exists in many organizations. We should start training programs for people of all ages to make them more aware of racism and ready to resist it. But we have to change more than attitudes. We also have to find ways to change the policies and power structures in our society. We can try harder to hire and promote people of color so that they can share the power to make important decisions. And old-fashioned management styles should give way to newer approaches, which work better for diverse populations. Lastly, because racism helps to maintain the power and wealth of a few rich white people at the top, we should make our economic system work more fairly. If we want to destroy racism, we must look very carefully at our institutions, and make the needed changes at all levels.

View 4:

We must overcome our doubts, stop thinking of ourselves as victims, and take responsibility for our own lives.

According to this view, we need to admit how internalized racism still affects us all, and we need to get past it. The best way to undo the effects of racism is through individual accomplishments. We will make real progress on race-related issues only when people of all races accept responsibility for their own lives, and really strive to fulfill their potential. In the end, we can promote racial equality by holding everyone to the same high standards — in school, at work, everywhere. Only then will people of color feel truly confident in their abilities. We must think about what each person can do to solve our most pressing problems — such as crime and vandalism, babies being born out of wedlock, low academic achievement, drugs, and guns. We also need to talk about right and wrong. We should turn to our families and our faiths for moral guidance and positive examples. Solutions to our race problems will be found in the way we lead our lives and the kinds of choices we make.

View 5:

People of color need to find strength in their own values and traditions.

According to this view, people of color make the greatest strides when we band together and pool our resources. In the past, institutions rooted in our unique traditions have nurtured and empowered us. For example, the black church has been a great resource and inspiration for many African-American leaders. In the future, we should strive to build cultural, political, social, and economic institutions that appreciate and emphasize the richness of our own cultures. Decades of working, picketing, and praying for improved race relations have taught us that trying to educate racist people is not the best use of our

energy. We should put our energy and talents to work where they are needed and valued, and where they benefit our own people. We may need to set up our own schools and businesses, and develop a new power base, so we don't have to fight racism wherever we turn. This may mean having very little contact with whites. When we focus on our own communities, we will draw strength from each other in a way that validates our heritages.

Wrap-up questions

1. **As you listened to others discuss what has shaped their views, what new insights and ideas did you gain?**

2. **What common concerns emerged in this discussion?**

3. **Which of the ideas raised here seem most promising? Why?**

4. **How do you think we can use the institutions in our communities (or in our nation) to make progress on race relations? What can our families do? religious groups? our schools? our businesses? the media? the government?**

For the next session, think about these questions:

When it comes to race, what direction should our public policies take?

What goals and values should shape our policies?

SESSION FOUR

What kinds of public policies will help us deal with race relations?

4

No one believes that the government alone has "the answer" to the race question. Still, almost every conversation about race relations comes around to public policies and their impact on us. Since policies affect race relations in our communities and our country, it is important to have a voice in determining their direction.

The purpose of this session is to begin a productive conversation on the general direction our public policies should take. What kinds of public policies will help us deal with race relations? This session presents a range of possible answers. The goal is not for participants to become experts in one particular policy area — say, affirmative action — or to agree on an answer. Instead, the goal is to "try on" the various views and learn from each other's ideas. Ultimately, this discussion will lay the groundwork for future actions we take and for our interactions with public officials at all levels.

Looking at the viewpoints

1. **Does one of the viewpoints, or some combination of views, come closest to your own? Why? What life experiences or values inform your perspective?**

2. **What view(s) are most distant from your own? What experiences, beliefs, and values might lead a reasonable person to support the views that are different from your own?**

3. **What are the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective?**

4. **Besides the ones presented here, what other kinds of policies would help us to reduce racism and improve race relations? What, if any, perspectives are missing?**

5. **What proposals would you like to see policymakers concentrate on? Why?**

What kinds of public policies will help us deal with race relations?

View 1:

Government should limit its efforts to enforcing laws against discrimination.

According to this view, the government's only obligation is to make sure that individuals of all races have a fair chance to compete for jobs, promotions, and admission to schools. It should not mandate "preferences" based on race because that is a form of discrimination. Even when preferential treatment is motivated by good intentions, it goes against our principles of fair play. Policies like affirmative action, which strive for equal results rather than equal opportunity, have gone too far. But there is an important role for government: enforcing the existing laws against racial discrimination. We already have good anti-discrimination laws that apply to housing, schools, jobs, and bank lending. These laws need to be better enforced. We should improve the government agencies that deal with discrimination, so that they can investigate complaints quickly and efficiently. By making sure the rules of the game are truly the same for everyone, regardless of race, the government will do a great deal to promote racial equality.

View 2:

We still need public policies that take race into account.

According to this view, race still needs to be a deciding factor in our public policies. First, we need to make racial equality a primary goal of public policies in all areas — education, jobs, housing, health care, transportation, and more. Second, we need policies that take race into account for hiring, school admissions, housing, and government contracts. By leveling the playing field, these policies help us deal with our long history of oppression and with current-day discrimination. Affirmative action, for instance, is moving us in the right direction. It has enabled minorities and women to make big gains. It has encouraged people to try harder to find qualified minorities, and it has provided

opportunities for talented people to work to reach their potential. But 30 years of that policy is just a beginning; white men have been given preference in education, employment, and property ownership for hundreds of years. Until our country becomes a place where race doesn't affect a person's chances for success, we will need to take race into account in our public policies.

View 3:

We need public policies that will jump-start our urban economies.

According to this view, we need public policies that create more opportunities for people who are truly disadvantaged. In the middle and upper classes, there are many opportunities for people of all races to get ahead. But many minorities are trapped in poor urban communities where economic opportunities are scarce. Because of this, our policies need to move beyond affirmative action, which usually helps people who are already in a good position to make it on their own. Today, government should find creative ways to jump-start the inner city economy and create job markets that would employ the people who live there. We should reduce red tape and offer big tax breaks to people who are willing to invest in poor neighborhoods. State and city governments should make it easier to start and run small businesses. If there are ways for people to provide for themselves, the government won't have to play that role. And, with better job prospects, young people will not to be drawn to illegal markets like the drug trade. We are striving for communities built on the spirit of individual achievement, where race is not a determining factor. To get there, we need policies that make hard work pay off in every community.

View 4:

We should make reparations to African-Americans for slavery.

According to this view, our government has never acknowledged how wrong it was to legalize and condone slavery for so many years. We cannot put a bandaid on the deep wounds that are the source of today's racial inequality. In fact, an apology for slavery should be just a beginning. Slavery and its effects must be acknowledged and paid for. This could take the form of payments to descendants of slaves, such as free college education for several generations. We have done this sort of thing before. For example, the U.S. government apologized to Japanese Americans who were interned in camps during World War II, and paid reparations to them and their families. Making amends for past injustices is also important to other racial and ethnic groups, including Native Americans. Until we make amends to African-Americans, we cannot make real progress in race relations. We can only make progress if we pay our debts.

View 5:

We should review our policies for the racist assumptions they contain, and take that racism out.

According to this view, we should carefully examine our public policies, since many of them contain racist assumptions that we don't even notice. We must look at all kinds of policies, not

just the ones that are specifically about race. Policies related to criminal justice, transportation, the environment, and education all need changes. In the criminal justice system, for example, people of color don't get a fair shake. Blacks and Hispanics receive much tougher sentencing than whites, for the same crimes. In addition, race is often a main reason that police become suspicious of someone; it is still legal to stop a person based on the color of their skin, because that person "fits the profile" of someone who would violate the law. And there is racial bias in how the death penalty is applied; we are, for instance, much more likely to execute people if their victims are white than if their victims are black. As for environmental policies, toxic sites are more likely to be located in areas where many people of color live. We should start an education campaign to let people know that these sorts of biases exist. Our biggest task will be to create fair, non-racist policies that we can all support.

View 6:

We need policies that address social and economic inequality.

According to this view, we need to deal with economic insecurity if we want to reduce racism. When people of any race are worried about keeping a good job, they are more likely to resent or "scapegoat" people from other racial groups. Across the board, Americans worry about unemployment, job security, rising medical and housing costs, the quality of public education, and more. Our public policies need to address the serious economic gaps in our society, and help people understand and cope with a global economy. We should invest in public education, build affordable housing, provide universal access to good health care and child care, as well as access to pre-school and after-school programs. Public works projects would be a great way to provide good jobs to low-skill workers. We should also set up job training programs, based on need. These kinds of programs would benefit all of us, but they would especially help poor minorities. By making investments in all people, we will be able to make racial progress over the long haul.

Wrap-up questions

1. **What new insights or ideas have you gained from this discussion that might help you in the future? What areas of common concern have emerged during this conversation?**

2. **Besides the ones that we have addressed here, what other policy areas are important when it comes to race issues?**

3. **Which themes or concerns raised in this discussion also apply to local policy issues?**

4. **What direction should our local policies take? What key values should shape these policies?**

For next time:

What kinds of concrete steps can you take in your everyday life — by yourself and with others — to improve race relations in your community?

What do you think is most needed in this community?

Be sure to read over the "Action ideas and examples" before your group meets to discuss the materials in Session 5.

For further discussion: Our values and our policies

Many people, even if they disagree about specific policy proposals, use the same terms to talk about the goals of our policies. The list below includes some of those terms. Is this the list you would make? What would you add?

"Our race policies should ...":

a) strive for fairness.
b) promote equal opportunity.
c) lead to the full inclusion of persons of color.
d) create a more compassionate society.
e) inspire responsibility.
f) promote diversity.
g) protect our freedom.
h) make up for past injuries.
i) promote core American values.
j) _____.

(1) If you were going to shape a public policy, where would you start? What would your goals be? Why?

(2) What do the items in the box mean to you? What values do you want race policies to promote?

(3) What personal experiences, values, or information shape your ideas?

(4) How attainable are your goals today? What stands in the way of reaching these goals?

(5) What sorts of current or past policies — for workplaces, schools, or governmental agencies — do you know of that do a good job of supporting the values that are important to you?

(6) When our values conflict, which ones should take priority? How would you set priorities for what we should do?

(7) What areas of common ground seem evident in your group? What sorts of guidelines would you recommend to policymakers?

SESSION FIVE

How can we move from words to action in our community?

5

While the racial issues we are facing in our communities sometimes seem overwhelming, it is possible to make a difference. By participating in this study circle program, you have already crossed the racial divide looking for better understanding and strategies that work.

Study circle participants follow up on their experience in many ways. Often they find that they share concerns. They sometimes find new partners, and work together to strengthen the community. The purpose of this session is to draw out ideas for steps we can take — as individuals, in groups, and as a whole community — to face the challenge of racism and race relations.

Get involved.

Act as an individual.

Work with groups in the community.

Start something new.

Keep the dialogue going (and growing).

Beginning the discussion

1. **What major themes came up in the course of these discussions? What shared concerns emerged?**

Looking at the action ideas and examples

2. **For the following questions, think of action steps on three levels — that is, actions you can take as individuals, in small groups, and in institutions.**

   a) **What two or three ideas seem most practical and useful?**
   b) **What would it take to turn these ideas into reality?**
   c) **What resources are already in place that could help us move ahead?**
   d) **What else do we need to find out? What other groups should we link up with?**

3. **The struggle to improve race relations has a long history in this country. How has change come about? That is, what strategies and actions were most helpful in the past? What kinds of efforts are needed today? Why?**

4. **What current efforts in our community are helping people and institutions to work on race? Share stories or projects you know about. Are those efforts working? Why or why not? How can we join or build on the effective efforts that are already underway? What else can we do?**

Editor's note: Many, but not all, of the action ideas and examples presented here came out of study circle programs around the country. The list is by no means complete. To help you come up with action plans, this session offers examples of creative approaches others have taken.

ACT AS AN INDIVIDUAL

1. ***Build interracial relationships.***

— **Work one-on-one with the people who share your community.**

Example: In one study circle in Delaware, participants broke into interacial pairs, forming a summertime "buddy system" for simple outings — for example, going out to lunch or shopping.

— **Encourage your children to develop friendships with children from other backgrounds.**

Example: The Danneel Street children's playgroup in New Orleans, Louisiana, is sponsored by the activist group Erace. The group came about because parents were committed to introducing their kids to children of other races. Parent volunteers help coordinate the playgroup and supervise playtime.

— **Welcome new neighbors, and seek opportunities to meet newcomers in the community. Reach out, especially if they are from a different background than yours.**

— **Be a mentor to young people.**

Example: In Cambridge, Maryland, a handful of study circle participants volunteered to work on a tutoring program designed to provide mentors for minority students.

Example: In Hampton, Virginia, one study circle transformed itself into a working group to plan a "Diversity Day" for young people and a forum for the whole community.

2. ***Patronize businesses that have fair hiring practices.***

3. ***Learn more about race and race relations.***

— **Take a class on race, or on the history of race relations in the United States. Check out reading and video resources in your local library.**

— **Attend concerts, plays, and museum exhibits that relate to the themes of race relations and diversity.**

— **Listen to and share stories about personal and family histories that are related to the history of race relations in our country.**

— **Seek out information about race relations in your community and in the country. Check the facts. What do you know about the racial makeup of your community? Do your perceptions match the facts?**

4. ***Pay attention to politics in your community. Take leadership on race relations.***

— **Approach top community leaders, and encourage them to foster public dialogue about race.**

— **Take leadership. You don't have to be an elected official, or a well-known civic leader to be effective.**

— **Speak up when people take positions that work against racial understanding and communication.**

— **Find out about your representatives in government. Are all the people in your community well represented? Are your representatives responsible leaders on race issues?**

— **Vote, and encourage others to vote. As elections near, volunteer to work on voter registration drives, or work to get out the vote. Or consider running for office yourself.**

Example: After participating in study circles, one group in New Jersey focused their efforts on local school board elections.

— **Get in touch with your representatives. Let them know your thoughts about the issues.**

WORK WITH EXISTING COMMUNITY EFFORTS, OR START NEW ONES

1. ***Find out what organizations or community programs are making progress on race, and volunteer for two hours each week.***

2. ***Help faith-based organizations form relationships and work together.***

Example: In many communities, study circles have helped to plant the seeds for further cooperation among religious organizations. For example, black and white ministers in Cambridge, Maryland; Utica, New York; Springfield, Massachusetts; Lexington, Kentucky; and Lima, Ohio, have used a variety of strategies to bring church communities together. They've paired congregations for study circles, arranged pulpit exchanges, and held joint services. (Contact SCRC for a copy of *Study Circles in Paired Congregations: Enriching Your Community Through Shared Dialogue on Vital Issues.*)

3. ***Respond to racial incidents when they arise in your schools, your community, and in the country.***

Example: In some communities around the country, volunteers monitor incidents of racist violence and then help to develop community responses to them. (At the national level, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Klanwatch Project is one of the most well-known of these anti-racism campaigns. To receive more information, contact the Klanwatch Project, 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Alabama 36104.)

Example: Interracial teams of study circle participants from Springfield, Massachusetts, traveled to South Carolina to help rebuild a church that had been burned there. Over a period of several months, team members and local citizens held study circles on race relations while they rebuilt the church. By addressing both the physical and psychological damage inflicted by the arson, the project fought bias crime on a number of levels. (Contact SCRC for a copy of the discussion guide, *"When a church is burned in our town ...": A Guide for Community Dialogue and Problem Solving.)*

Example: Informal and formal student groups across the U.S. organize to fight racism on their campuses. They hold teach-ins, vigils, rallies, and discussions. Some of them organize to lobby for or against specific campus or governmental policies.

4. Use drama and art as a way to raise consideration of race issues in the community.

— **Community arts projects can take many forms: photo-text exhibits; video and audio "speak outs"; murals and other pieces of public art; cultural festivals; musical events; and interactive theater productions.**

Example: City residents filled the Civic Center for Lima, Ohio's annual Community-wide Diversity Day. The organizations, community leaders, and citizens who had taken part in study circles planned, coordinated, and performed in the festivities. The poet Maya Angelou spoke movingly to the crowd, helping the city to celebrate its diversity and saluting the progress it is making through study circles.

Example: In Highland Park, New Jersey, a group of study circle participants got together to write a play about race relations in their community.

Example: An interracial singing group, called The Unity Choir, was started in Lima, Ohio, as a result of the study circles there.

Example: Following their first round of study circles in 1995, participants in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, organized a summer film festival to highlight diversity issues. Since then, the film festival has become a summer tradition.

Example: One outcome of the Springfield, Ohio, study circles was their "Culture Fest," a festival organized by the city and county to highlight and celebrate local ethnic cultures. The event featured bands, local artisans, performers, and many vendors. In addition, city and county schools sponsored storytelling from various cultural traditions. Over 75 volunteers worked with the city departments to make the event happen, and thousands of people turned out to take part in the festivities. Study circles were highlighted during the event, and people were encouraged to get involved in the next round.

5. Get people together to explore your community's history of race relations.

— **Pull together a group of people to interview residents about the history of race relations in your community. Consider working with the local newspaper, or with a teacher at a local school or college. Students might create a documentary as part of their coursework.**

— **Organize a walk-through-history in your community. Ask different groups to select a site that is particularly important, and invite them to tell about the history associated with that location.**

— **Talk to the staff of your state humanities or arts councils to learn about artists, speakers, public programs, and publications. (Fees may be involved, but they are likely to be modest.)**

Example: Through 1997 and 1998, the city of Wilmington, North Carolina, will coordinate a centennial commemoration of a period in the city's history that significantly affected race relations. Study circles on race will be part of this community's effort to acknowledge and address a painful part of their history.

Example: In June, 1993, *Hope in the Cities* and leaders of metropolitan Richmond, Virginia, hosted a national conference, *Healing the Heart of America: An honest conversation on race, reconciliation, and responsibility*. Residents of the former Capital of the Confederacy — from city and suburbs, both black and white — came together in an unprecedented walk through the city to acknowledge events and sites in the racial history of the community. (See the resource section for more information.)

Example: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is finding new ways to promote racial justice and improve race relations in the United States. An upcoming WILPF symposium will draw on lessons from the South African Truth and Reconciliation hearings and, during the course of the event, participants in small-group discussions will have a chance to talk about their experiences with race and race relations, and think about how to promote equality and reconciliation in this country. (For more information on WILPF's Racial Justice campaign, contact WILPF, 1213 Race Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107-1691, telephone: (215) 563-7110.)

6. ***Look for innovative ways to cross racial lines and support the development of businesses.***

Example: After more than 400 people took part in study circles in Utica, New York, the Observer-Dispatch published a story on moving from talk to action. One suggestion: "Create a grass-roots network to publicize private and public job openings, recruit qualified minority applicants, provide training in test-taking and conduct follow-up interviews after the application process, and if need arises, publicize instances of discrimination."

— **Find ways to build interracial support systems and exchange information about shared business concerns.**

Example: The *Mississippi Business Journal* reported that the Metro Jackson Chamber of Commerce initiated "Positive Links Uniting Sources (PLUS)" — a program to improve race relations in the region. Its goal is to foster business relationships between whites and minorities "by identifying joint venture projects, referrals, and networking opportunities."

7. ***Work across racial and ethnic boundaries on common problems.***

Example: After their study circles, people in Lima, Ohio, got together to start a new food pantry, the Daily Bread Soup Kitchen, to serve needy people in the community.

Example: In Prince George's County, Maryland, study circle participants formed a committee to raise money for a local shelter.

Example: In Los Angeles, California, the Leadership Development in Interethnic Relations (LDIR) program, is helping people deal with a range of problems — from racially motivated fights in high schools to misunderstandings among neighbors. LDIR conducts skill-building programs on conflict resolution and collaboration to help people improve interethnic relations in their communities.

Example: In study circle programs around the country, multiracial coalitions are bringing diverse groups of people together to reduce crime and violence, to make an impact on youth issues, and to improve schools. (Contact SCRC for more information about these programs.)

8. *Find ways to involve area businesses in improving race relations.*

— **Begin within your own organization by educating the staff about racism.**

Example: Some college and university administrations sponsor racism and race relations workshops as part of their freshman orientation programs, or for faculty members. Many businesses sponsor diversity training programs for employees.

— **Make workforce diversity a priority.**

Example: In Springfield, Ohio, an alcohol and drug treatment agency gave its employees time during the business day to participate in study circles. One result of their study circles was a commitment to build a more racially-diverse workforce. Program directors have already taken steps to improve hiring practices.

— **Look for ways to involve area businesses in study circle efforts.**

Example: Study circle organizers in New Castle County, Delaware, are finding ways to work with community groups, academia, and major corporations like the DuPont company. DuPont has not only provided funding to support the local initiative, but also human relations diversity trainers to train facilitators to conduct the study circle workshops. A cooperative effort involves using study circles (on voluntary basis) as part of a business unit or function diversity awareness effort.

Example: As part of the executive loan program, an IBM employee was granted a one-year social service leave to coordinate a community-wide study circle program in New Rochelle, New York. Focusing on youth issues, almost 200 participants attended forums and took part in study circles to talk about violence, youth empowerment, and substance abuse issues.

9. *Help improve race relations in your community's schools.*

— **Encourage teachers to include race issues in their lesson plans, or work to broaden the curriculum.**

Example: In Highland Park, New Jersey, study circles organizers met with school administrators to talk about making study circles on race relations a part of the curriculum. In addition, "as a result of insights gained from the study circles," two newly-elected school board members explored ideas to create a more inclusive curriculum and review hiring practices in the schools.

Example: Around the country, teachers at all levels bring discussion of race relations into their classrooms. (*Teaching Tolerance*, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, provides teachers with resources for promoting interracial and intercultural understanding in the classroom. For more information, contact Teaching Tolerance, 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36104.)

Example: One study circle in Sioux City, Iowa, was concerned about whether the public school curriculum accurately reflects the history of minority groups and their contributions to the development of our nation. Members of the study circle met with the Curriculum Director of the Sioux City Community School District, who let them know that course offerings to be implemented in the fall of 1997 will address those concerns and invited them to review the new curriculum.

Example: As a result of the study circles in Muncie, Indiana, participants organized a task force called People Against Racism (PAR) to work on issues of race with leaders from various sectors of the community. One of PAR's projects was the development a cosmetology program with the Muncie schools to provide education on hairdressing for different ethnic groups.

— **When language differences create challenges, work to improve communication between students, parents, and school administrators. Or volunteer to work with students and parents to strengthen their English or foreign language skills.**

— **Start a study circle program for youth in the schools.**

Example: Since 1994, the Springfield, Ohio Department of Human Relations, Housing, and Neighborhood Services has assisted a study circle program in the high schools, designed to promote interracial dialogue and cross-cultural understanding. So far, more than 800 students have been involved. Freshman are trained as facilitators, while upperclassmen and students from a nearby university serve as mentors to the new students.

10. Support or create community programs that bring together young people from diverse backgrounds.

Example: In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a city-sponsored youth group formed a Teen Advisory Group (TAG) to recruit Hmong and white students to work together on student-led community projects.

Example: In New Rochelle, New York, organizers brought young people together to talk about "Youth Empowerment, Substance Abuse, and Violence." Coordinated by the local Volunteer Center of the United Way, in conjunction with the City of New Rochelle and the New Rochelle school district, this creative program interspersed large public meetings with study circles, using *Youth Issues, Youth Voices* (published by SCRC in 1996).

Example: Common Ground, a youth leadership program launched in Hartford, Connecticut, brings together area high school students for leadership training and community service. The program gives students an opportunity to learn how people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds can work together to address common concerns. Common Ground's student speakers lead workshops and discussion groups around diversity, youth empowerment, and community service. (For more information on how this program works, or for a copy of their newsletter, write to Common Ground, 250 Constitution Plaza, Hartford, CT 06103.)

11. Support or create programs that bring together people of diverse backgrounds.

Example: In Miami, Florida, a city councilman organized domino matches between people from different neighborhoods of the city. The tournaments brought together people from Little Havana and the predominantly African-American Black Grove, and helped to foster intercultural exchanges.

Example: An African-American woman, a newcomer to a Cleveland suburb, was disgusted by the racism she had experienced. Just when she was ready to move out, she began participating in a study circle organized as part of Greater Cleveland's "Honest Conversations" program. She found that others were receptive to her concerns and experiences, formed a number of relationships with people in the group, decided not to move, and is now one of the key organizers for the study circles in that community.

HELP KEEP THE DIALOGUE GOING (AND GROWING)

After you participate in a study circle, you can volunteer your services to the organizing team in a number of ways.

— **Be trained as a facilitator, and help with future rounds of study circles in your community.**

— **Recruit friends, colleagues, and neighbors, and help organize new study circles in your neighborhood or in a local high school.**

— **Help get the word out. Let people know about the program, and how they can get involved.**

— **Find ways to involve young people in study circles. They might take part in the program as participants, or work as facilitators.**

— **Work on a study circle newsletter to keep people informed of new developments, to keep participants in touch, and to publicize the study circles.**

— **Help organize a "church pairing" program, bringing together congregations of different faiths and races to learn from each other and work together.**

— **Help seek additional support for the study circle program. Visit community leaders to tell them about the program, or volunteer to give a brief presentation at community meetings.**

— **Work with organizers to get the media, local businesses, public officials, and others to support your community's study circle program.**

Example: Following an initial first round of study circles in Jeffersonville, Indiana, local businesses raised money for future study circles. Organizers from those businesses printed brochures and began aggressively recruiting people to take part in the expanding community-wide program on race relations.

Example: In New Castle County, Delaware, the local paper supported the study circle program by running *pro bono* advertisements. The ad issued a call to community members to do something to improve race relations, and it provided information on how to get involved with the study circles in the community.

Example: In January, 1994, Akron, Ohio's *Beacon Journal* issued a call to community members to do whatever they could to improve race relations. More than 22,000 people responded to the paper's New Year's resolution challenge. The *Beacon Journal* also published a coupon, inviting organizations to express their interest in getting involved. More than 140 organizations returned the coupon, signing on as supporters of their community's effort to address race relations. (A similar strategy might work for a study circle program.)

— **Organize other discussions on issues that came up in the study circles.**

Example: In Glen Ridge, New Jersey, after participating in study circles on race, group members initiated community discussions about the Holocaust, in an effort to improve relations between people of color and Jewish community members.

— **Help organize study circles on other important community issues.**

Example: The success of widespread study circles on race relations in Lima, Ohio, led the community to expand the program and to address other issues. Since their study circles on race, the working group has organized community-wide study circles on crime and violence, as well as on youth issues.

Example: Maine's Roundtable Center has helped to organize study circles on a range of issues — abortion, economics, youth issues, diversity, what it means to be American, gay rights, and environmental issues.

Example: The first round of study circles in Syracuse, New York, focused on children's issues. Their second round focused on race relations and racial healing.

Example: In Oklahoma, study circle organizers (led by the League of Women Voters) sponsored a statewide program on criminal justice issues, and moved on to organize a statewide program on education.

Wrap-up questions

1. **How has your participation in the study circles affected your outlook on race relations in this community? How will it affect your involvement? Give specific examples.**

2. **How will you continue to make a difference on race issues in your community?**

TIPS FOR STUDY CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS

The goal of a study circle is to grapple with complex public issues in a democratic way, so participants can better understand those issues and find ways to make a difference on them. The process — democratic discussion among equals — is as important as the content. In a safe, focused discussion, people exchange ideas freely and consider a variety of views. Study circles seek common ground — that is, areas of general agreement — but consensus or compromise is not necessary. By uncovering shared concerns and coming up with practical strategies, people often find they can work collaboratively to improve their community.

The following points are intended to help you make the most of your study circle experience:

- Make a good effort to attend all meetings. The comfort level and depth of conversation depend upon familiarity with other participants.
- Think together about what you want to get out of your conversation.
- Help keep the discussion on track. Make sure your remarks are relevant.
- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the conversation.
- Really try to understand what others are saying and respond to their ideas, especially when their thinking is different from yours. (In other words, seek first to understand, then to be understood.)
- Be open to changing your mind. This will help you really listen to others' views.
- When disagreement occurs, don't personalize it. Try to identify the ideas that are in conflict. Search for the common concerns beneath the surface.
- Don't waste time arguing about points of fact. For the time being, you may need to agree to disagree and then move on. You might decide to check out the facts together before your next meeting.
- Value one another's experiences. Think about how your own experiences have contributed to your thinking.
- Help to develop one another's ideas. Listen carefully, and ask clarifying questions.

AN OVERVIEW OF STUDY CIRCLES

What is a study circle?

The study circle is a simple process for small-group deliberation. Some of its defining characteristics follow:

- A study circle is a small group of people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.
- A study circle is facilitated by a person who is there not to act as an expert on the issue, but to serve the group by keeping the discussion focused, helping the group consider a variety of views, and asking probing questions.
- A study circle looks at an issue from many points of view. Study circle facilitators and discussion materials give everyone "a home in the conversation," and help the group explore areas of common ground.
- A study circle progresses from a session on personal experience ("how does the issue affect me?") to sessions providing a broader perspective ("what are others saying about the issue?") to a session on action ("what can we do about the issue here?").

What is a community-wide study circle program?

Study circles can take place within organizations, such as schools, congregations, workplaces, or government agencies. *They have their greatest reach and impact, however, when community organizations work together to create large-scale programs.* These community-wide programs engage large numbers of citizens — in some cases thousands of people — in study circles on a public issue such as race relations, crime and violence, or education. Broad-based, cross-sector sponsoring coalitions create strong, diverse community participation. Participants in study circles have an opportunity to make an impact on an issue they care about.

How do community-wide study circle programs come into being?

Typically, a single organization such as a mayor's office, a school board, or a human relations commission initiates and staffs the project. In most communities, one organization takes the lead and approaches other key organizations to build a sponsoring coalition. Most community-wide programs have ten to thirty organizations as sponsors or endorsers. Grass-roots organizations such as churches, neighborhood associations, businesses, schools, and clubs often take part.

What are the outcomes of community-wide study circle programs?

By participating in study circles, citizens can gain "ownership" of the issues, discover a connection between personal experiences and public policies, and gain a deeper understanding

of their own and others' perspectives and concerns. They often discover common ground and a greater desire and ability to work collaboratively to solve local problems — as individuals, as members of small groups, and as members of large organizations in the community. Community-wide study circle programs frequently foster new connections among community members that lead to new levels of community action. They can also create new connections between citizens and government, both at an institutional level and among parents and teachers, community members and social service providers, residents and police officers.

If you would like to know where community-wide study circles are happening, or where study circle coalitions are forming, please contact the Study Circles Resource Center.

NOTES

Setting ground rules for the discussion

At the beginning of a study circle, the facilitator and group members should spend some time talking about ground rules for the discussion. These are meant to be guidelines for how members will relate to each other, how they will handle complex ideas, and how they will ensure that the study circle is a positive, safe, and fair experience for everyone.

Here are some "tried and true" groundrules that are often used in study circles. You may want to begin with these, and add others. Whatever you decide, the rules should "belong" to the group as a whole. This list may be revised at any point along the way.

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Share "air time."
- Say "ouch," if necessary; then educate.
- Conflict should not be personalized. Don't label, stereotype, or call people names.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.

Note: In addition, it is important for groups to talk about confidentiality and to consider ground rules for handling it.

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